



February 13, 2019

In December 2018, the Cromwell Board of Education initiated an investigation into allegations made in an anonymous letter mailed to Board members and a number of district employees at their homes, together with a disc containing footage from the school security camera system. The letters were received by Board members and district employees on or around December 6, 2018. The letter alleged, among other things, the existence of a “harassing work environment” attributed to the conduct of the Assistant Superintendent, Dr. Krista Karch. The letter also alleged an “inappropriate relationship” between Dr. Karch and the Superintendent, John Maloney. The letter indicated that this purported inappropriate relationship caused Mr. Maloney’s judgment, professionalism, and handling of Dr. Karch’s conduct to be “biased” and “corrupt.”

This investigation has proceeded principally by way of witness interviews. The main investigative phase has largely come to a close, though additional information will be reported to the Board if it should become available.

The interview component of the investigation focused on three primary areas for factual development:

First, whether the allegations of a harassing work environment made in the anonymous letter could be corroborated by first hand experiences or documentary evidence;

Second, whether the anonymous letter reflected the only available means of reporting such complaints for an aggrieved person (or persons) or if other more appropriate reporting channels exist; and

Third, how video surveillance footage was accessed, copied, and distributed outside the district and whether changes to District systems should be implemented.

During the course of the investigation, interviews were conducted with the Superintendent and Assistant Superintendent, as well as present and former:

- School administrators;
- Teachers;
- IT and facilities staff; and
- Custodial and office staff

Investigative interviews each touched on some or all of the three primary factual areas outlined above. Each witness was informed of the nature of the investigation, that information

developed through those interviews will be shared with the Board, and each was asked not to share the questions or information discussed during these interviews with others in order to preserve the integrity of the investigation and avoid tainting the current recollections of other witnesses. During the investigation, Mr. Maloney and Dr. Karch were on paid administrative leave, with instructions not to communicate with any Cromwell Board of Education employees.

During these interviews, witnesses reported the following:

- Some District employees reported that they experienced, or heard of others experiencing, interactions with Dr. Karch that were unpleasant or upsetting to them. In particular, witnesses described interactions involving criticism of their professional performance by Dr. Karch, which the witnesses viewed as unwarranted or incorrect based on their own subjective assessments of their work performance. Others described criticism for voicing disagreement with Dr. Karch. Some witnesses described instances of Dr. Karch standing close to them when communicating, pointing at them, and touching their shoulders, arms, or other non-intimate areas when communicating—an issue that at least one teacher addressed directly with Dr. Karch. Other witnesses described Dr. Karch as always professional, upbeat, and animated. Mr. Maloney indicated during his interview that he had spoken with Dr. Karch about this perception of inappropriate contact, and that he had made it clear to Dr. Karch that the conduct should change.
- Witnesses described their perception of departures from the district as being attributable to numerous factors, including changing climate, better opportunities elsewhere, and unknown reasons. One witness described their own departure as attributable to unclear and confusing job expectations, reassignment of responsibilities, and at least one interaction with Dr. Karch that was upsetting to the witness, involving criticism of the witness's performance and direction that the witness and others improve, which was perceived as unwarranted by the witness.
- Some District employees described marked changes for the better in the District during Mr. Maloney and Dr. Karch's tenure. Specifically, certain employees described greater attention to curriculum and improvement of test scores. These recent changes were described as largely being focused on the lower grade schools. Still other employees described certain new curriculum going unfinished and, more generally, confusion regarding changing expectations of their roles within the District.
- Interview subjects uniformly described Mr. Maloney and Dr. Karch as constantly appearing together during school visits, routinely being late for or absent from scheduled meetings, and occasionally noticeably distancing themselves from other District personnel at events and meetings and participating in private side conversation.
- Descriptions of a romantic relationship between Mr. Maloney and Dr. Karch, as suggested by the anonymous letter, were uniformly admitted by witnesses to be the product of speculation based on the perceived closeness between Dr. Karch and Mr. Maloney and their routine absences from scheduled meetings. These rumors and speculation were not based on any first-hand observation by the interview subjects of

conduct crossing a professional boundary – the sole exception being the conduct depicted on the surveillance video released by way of the anonymous letter. Others denied any suspicion or observation of conduct suggesting the existence of such a relationship prior to the distribution of the video.

- Mr. Maloney and Dr. Karch denied having a romantic or intimate relationship. Mr. Maloney initially denied that the video showed him kissing Dr. Karch on the lips. Dr. Karch denied that the video showed a kiss at all.
- While certain witnesses indicated that they had raised concerns about Dr. Karch to Mr. Maloney and felt that their concerns were dismissed or did not feel that they could bring such concerns to Mr. Maloney at all (for example, by being told to simply “get along with” Dr. Karch), others felt that they could raise, and indeed had raised, concerns about Dr. Karch to Mr. Maloney, which were promptly addressed and resolved by Mr. Maloney to the witness’s satisfaction.
- Some district personnel reported having adequate reporting channels available to them in the event that they suspected or observed misconduct by the Superintendent or Assistant Superintendent. These included established channels for reporting through the witness’s unions or administrators, as well as comfort with speaking to Board members. Still, others reported that they understood why a district employee might feel that an anonymous letter was their only recourse with respect to complaints about Mr. Maloney.
- Witnesses reported a noticeable split of opinion among teachers and staff in the district, with a nearly equal positive and negative perception of Mr. Maloney and Dr. Karch.
- No witness admitted to preparing or sending the anonymous letter. No witness admitted to knowing of the letter or plans to send such a letter prior to it being distributed.
- Similarly, no witness admitted to preparing and/or distributing the DVD of surveillance video sent with the anonymous letter. However, one administrator did report viewing the video several days after the events it depicts, in mid-October, and showing or bringing its existence to the attention of other District personnel.
- A number of District employees acknowledged having access to the security camera system and the ability to review footage (including building administrators). However, all but the IT staff denied knowledge of how to generate a disc of the footage. Witnesses generally stated they would rely on Information Technology staff to do so.
- Certain District employees interviewed expressed that they were uncomfortable with the apparent ability of someone to access security video, copy it, and distribute it outside the District.

- During the course of the investigation, email correspondence received on District computers indicated that Dr. Karch may have attempted to contact Mr. Maloney during the investigation and while the two were on administrative leave. These included two emails sent from Dr. Karch's personal email account to Mr. Maloney's school email account, attaching documents with information germane to the investigation. Dr. Karch represented that she believes she accidentally sent these emails to Mr. Maloney's school email address out of force of habit. Per Board directive, Maloney did not have access to his school email address while the investigation related to his conduct was ongoing.

The investigation could not substantiate a romantic relationship between Mr. Maloney and Dr. Karch. The investigation also concluded that Dr. Karch did not engage in harassing behavior towards her staff. The investigation revealed that Mr. Maloney was generally well respected by his colleagues and that he and Dr. Karch were generally moving the District in a positive direction. Based on these conclusions, at a Board meeting on January 24, 2019, the Board determined Mr. Maloney could effectively return to his role as Superintendent of Schools and voted unanimously to end Mr. Maloney's paid leave and return him to his position. The Board scheduled a similar meeting with Dr. Karch for February 4, 2019 to address her employment status.

- On February 1, 2019, the Board received a report that Dr. Karch and Mr. Maloney were seen together at a restaurant after Mr. Maloney had returned from paid leave, but while Dr. Karch was still on leave and under a directive not to communicate with District employees.
- During a meeting with the Board on February 4, 2019, Dr. Karch communicated to the Board that she complied with the terms of her paid leave status and had not had any contact with any District employees, including Mr. Maloney. Later in that meeting, when confronted with information about the February 1st sighting, Dr. Karch acknowledged that she had not been truthful in her earlier statements and confirmed the February 1st encounter with Mr. Maloney, which was a clear violation of her administrative leave status. On that same evening, Mr. Camilleri, the Board Chair, called Mr. Maloney and asked him whether he met with Dr. Karch on the evening of February 1, 2019. At first, Mr. Maloney confirmed he was at the restaurant in question but denied that he had been there with Dr. Karch. Minutes later however, Mr. Maloney did confirm he met with Dr. Karch at a restaurant on the evening of February 1, 2019 to discuss the District's budget. Mr. Maloney acknowledged to Mr. Camilleri that he understood this encounter violated Dr. Karch's paid leave directives and demonstrated a profound lack of judgment on his part. Based on these recent revelations, which called into question how truthful Dr. Karch and Mr. Maloney had been during the course of Shipman & Goodwin's investigation, the Board Chair, through legal counsel, asked both individuals to submit their voluntary resignations. The Board accepted said resignations at its February 13, 2019 special meeting.